

The Life History of a Queen's Maimed Stela: An Analysis and Review of the Ethics Regarding the Repatriation of El Perú Stela 34

Aims of Research

- My research traces Stela 34's journey, examining its removal from Guatemala and possible return.
- I call for improved ethical practices and respect for Indigenous perspectives in repatriation.
- While repatriation is the goal, alternative options are explored, such as returning a 3-D photogrammetric cast to the site or MUNAE (Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología) in Guatemala.
- The plans, informed by varied perspectives, emphasize holistic consideration of the stela's preservation and ethical stewardship.

Dedicated to Dr. Ian Graham



El Perú Stela 34 at Waka' found by Ian Graham. (Graham 2010:299).

Analysis & Advocacy Plans

- **Ethical Challenges and Advocacy**
 - 1970 UNESCO Convention; Dealers and Collectors; Legal cases; Naranjo Stela 8; and Resistance, Advocacy, and Intervention.
- **Advocacy Plans for the upper register:**
 - 1. Return of Original vs. Return of a Replica to Site
 - 2. Return of Original vs. Return of a Replica to MUNAE
 - Plans Prioritize: *feasibility, legality, ethics, diplomacy, preservation, and cultural significance.*
 - Potential destinations include Waka', MUNAE, and CMA.

References

Timeline

- **Early 1960's-** Stela 34 looted and brought to the US.
- **1967-** The Cleveland Museum of Art accessioned Stela 34 into their museum collection.
- **1970/71-** Dr. Ian Graham visited Waka' and found the remains of Stela 34 dissected into large blocks.
- **1971-** Dr. Graham learns of the existence of the Stela 34 Lower Register in San Diego.
- **2007-** The 3D Replica of Stela 33 (Stela 34's paired Stela) was created at the Kimball Art Museum.
- **2017-** The Lower Register was repatriated to Guatemala by the Los Angeles FBI Art Crime Unit.
- **2025-** The Upper Register remains at the CMA and the Lower Register is in MUNAE's storage.



Sydney Berenson pictured with Stela 34 Upper Register at the CMA. Photo by Julie Berenson.

Methodology/Data

- Multidisciplinary approach: ethnographic interviews and archival research.
- Ethnographic Interviews: with archaeologists, curators, and an FBI Agent.
- Archival Sources: Analyzed various documents, including books, journal articles, legal records, and correspondence.



Sydney Berenson pictured with Stela 34 Back and Sides at El Perú-Waka'. Photo by Henry McMahon.



Stela 34 Upper and Lower combined. Photo courtesy of Dr. Phil Wanyera.

Conclusion

- Looting, repatriation, cultural preservation, and ethical Issues extend beyond archaeology, involving museums, heritage collaborators, and Indigenous communities.
- Repatriation is challenging but essential for restoring cultural heritage and reconnecting communities with their history.
- Proposed solution:
 - Two casts of Stela 34 for (1) The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) and (2) Waka'. Repatriate the original Stela 34 to MUNAE in Guatemala for preservation and public engagement. This ensures both education and safeguarding the original artifact.

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